

# Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF

6

December 1992 - January 1993

EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS  
IN VIENNA

## Turning a new page together

The preparations for the European meeting in Vienna and its surroundings are entering their final phase. In a months time tens of thousands of young adults from all over Europe will meet in the Austrian capital.

Many are deciding to open their doors to welcome those who will come from all directions. Those who will take part in the European meeting will be able to discover in Vienna a great vitality which expresses itself in multiple gestures of solidarity.

Already now the parishes and the residents of the capital are showing great hospitality by welcoming refugees from Bosnia. It is not rare to find,

even in parish halls, families of refugees, sometimes Muslims. People are happy to receive visitors, whose presence will be a stimulant and an encouragement.

In this region, at the centre of Europe, tensions and conflicts are felt immediately, so people are glad in advance at the new page that is being turned in these years for the Church, for society and for relations between nations.



The cathedral of St. Stephen is at the heart of the city. Every day people from far and near come to pray in silence until late into the night. For the last 10 years young people have been meeting each Wednesday for a simple, meditative prayer. It is now part of the preparation for the meeting.

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# Taizé

European Meeting  
of young adults

28 December 1992  
- 2 January 1993

# Vienna

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### A BIG SUPPORT

In and around Vienna, many young lay people help to organize groups and take on responsibilities in the life of the Church. They are a great support for those who came from Taizé to prepare the European meeting.

In some parishes, young people are going to visit families and are asking the parishioners if they are going to respond to the request that the priest made of them.

For many, the preparation is an opportunity to become better acquainted with people of the parish who may have been known only by sight. Many of these small preparation teams are proposing that there be a regular time of prayer.

News of those preparing to come to Vienna from throughout Europe helps us sense, just as in previous years, a great desire for a deep encounter with God and with others. For those who will be proposing prayers and times of reflection before the departure, themes and a format for prayer were given in previous Letters from Taizé.

**Gestures of solidarity with  
Russia, Roumania,  
Bosnia and Somalia:  
see page 7**



"Christ, who is united to every human being without exception, expects a personal response from you. You have come to Taizé to go to the wellsprings of God through prayer, silence, searching. You have come to discover...to rediscover a meaning for your life, to gain new vitality, to prepare yourself to take on responsibilities in your own situation."

These lines are taken from the text which each person is asked to read when they arrive in Taizé. Throughout the week, day after day, the searching becomes more intense. To find more silence, many go in the afternoon to the large zone in the woods set aside for silence, close to the spring, to the tiny lake and the small chapel at the foot of the hill.

On Saturday afternoons this year, a 'forum' provided an opportunity to listen to the multitude of possible commitments in a great many different situations: people from different continents expressed themselves one after another in ways both joyful and serious.

Not running away, preparing oneself to be responsible, taking risks for solidarity, are ways of responding to God's trust. This requires an inner step that Sheila, from the Philippines, describes as an inner pilgrimage:

"Looking back to the last three months, I find that it has been one of the most dramatic, most fruitful periods of my life. I was expected to come in the summer but I arrived during the autumn instead. I braced myself for the weather which people who had been to Europe told me about, but I soon realized that one could never really prepare for the cold. With a suitcase packed with my best clothes, and filled with expectations that I could not even discern, I set out to begin my life in Taizé.

The very first word that I remember being told (after the Welcome and Orientation) and which struck me the most was the word "discover" spoken by a mild-brother from South Korea whose face seemed to wear a perpetually shy and unassuming smile. This was a word that was no longer new to me but one that the meaning and essence of which I would eventually learn. And it was through the process of discovery that I would stumble upon the basic questions of the Christian faith, as well as my own questions. The beginnings were not easy and never clear.

But each day lead me to discover that I was on a journey, a search of an unexplicable kind. Something beckoned and something within me responded. I had prepared for most things, but the ques-

tions that arose caught me off guard. And then I knew - I was on a pilgrimage.

## SIMPLICITY, SINCERITY, TRUST... AND A LITTLE COURAGE

One might think that life in Taizé is unnatural, or even austere. So much so that it can cause young people to think in unordinary ways. On the contrary, the lifestyle in Taizé is busy and creative, festive, and productive, very simple and truly normal.

And it was in this atmosphere that I discovered the essential things in life. It would be impossible to document the effects of a pilgrimage, much more to put it down into words.

How does one describe it? To be perfectly honest, I would dare to say that the searching does not end in Taizé, but it may begin there.

I came with a suitcase full of my best things. But the best is not the best in Taizé. What counts most is humility, sincerity, and faith. (And a little courage on the side.) The qualities of a child. If I arrived clothed in so many things, I left Taizé nakedly open to the possibilities that God might require of me.

As I continue with my life today in the fast-paced world that we all live in and I find my faith slipping, I gain confidence once more by recalling the times that I have spent in that unique community where silence is in harmony with festivity and where light and darkness are wed. And my mind begins to walk through the forest and through the hills to the wellsprings of faith."

# The urgency of preparing reconciliations

Reflections from three different countries

This responsibility that each person can discover, or rediscover, in Taizé, can seem frightening at first, a kind of heavy burden that we feel we are unable to carry. But far from crushing us, this responsibility sets free new energies.

For example, here is what one young person who came to Taizé with a group has to say. Their small town in the North of France has experienced great tensions this year:

## I HAVE MANY FRIENDS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

"I went to Taizé at Easter with a group from the diocese of Cambrai. When we returned to Haumont, we decided to begin a regular prayer. Several of us take turns preparing it. We meet every Friday at 8:30pm in the basement of an old abbey, or in the church. The priests mention this prayer at Mass, inviting all who wish to join us.

We thought that at first there would only be the young people who had gone to Taizé. Not at all! Other parishioners came to the very first prayer, and have kept coming back. For us it was a great joy. Every Friday there are at least ten people present. It is so wonderful to see adults in a parish respond to an invitation from the young. For us it is very encouraging.

We have discovered something in Taizé and it has made us stronger in the face of the problems our town is experiencing. There are great problems of racism here in Haumont. Slum dwell-





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ings are rented to some families at a very high price. There is also much unemployment. Because of this, many young people are in the streets. People are afraid of delinquency.

Two years ago, the mayor asked young French people of North African background not to gather in groups at certain spots in town. This year, at the beginning of June, he organized a referendum to find out if people agreed with his policy regarding immigration in our town. The question he asked was very vague so that no one could accuse him of racism. He does not want any newcomers in our area.

This has led to problems right in the church. Some adults were in agreement with the mayor denouncing to the public authorities the problems we have here. The priests opposed the mayor openly. They cannot accept racism. Our community has been wounded by all this. Many people are not happy that the priests have spoken out. In the end, the mayor received 80% of the vote.

"Personally, and I think my friends from the student group who have gone to Taizé agree, our stay there has helped me to get through these difficult times, to understand that we can all live together and accept each other as we are.

I understand the mayor's reaction, but all I have learned and experienced in Taizé has given me the strength to refuse hatred and racism. It is not good to set communities against one another.

I have many friends from foreign backgrounds...and this makes no difference at all to me. Young people have taken part in a group of persons of different backgrounds who condemned

racism. We can live together in Taizé, so why not in Haumont?"

On a different level, the presence of more and more young people from Russia and Ukraine is leading to a deeper reflection on the responsibilities to be taken concerning the urgent need to prepare for reconciliations in Europe:

In welcoming Russians during the meetings, you discover more concretely how they have been wounded by the trials they have undergone. Plunged into a completely new universe, they are disoriented, impatient, extremely sensitive. As a concluding argument they invoke their irreducible "foreignness" by proclaiming: "We are not like you; we are different!"

## THE FEAR OF MAKING A MISTAKE, OR OF BEING CRITICISED

Up till now they have been supported by a rigid and narrow framework; in the face of new freedoms, their heads are spinning. They find it hard to make decisions, to commit themselves, to take on responsibilities or initiatives. They are afraid of making mistakes, afraid of being criticised. They live with their hearts. They are affectionate, close to one another, compassionate...

And since all they have to live on is their painful and silent longing, they reveal bluntly to us how far we are at times from our own hearts, how overburdened we are with precautions, with other serious and urgent

necessities. They have a pride which could at first be mistaken for presumption. It seems all the more inappropriate and naive since it cannot hide poverty and flaws.

But it mirrors a pride that remains hidden from our own eyes: our own self-assurance, the pretention to judge from on high other people's lacks and failings. There is an ingenuous pride in some Westerners who have identified themselves so strongly with their living standard, with democracy, with social security, with their independence, their efficiency.

Westerners tend to view things with fear. Threats have caused us to avert our eyes from the drama for such a long time. Christians, however, need to see things from another point of view. Far from being overwhelmed with guilt at the number of times we have run away from truth, run away from the suffering of that wounded person left on the roadside, we can find new energies to build together. To do this, we must learn to recognize Christ in the mute innocence of those who have been carried away by an impetuous torrent.

Where can we recognize the holiness of Christ in countries where atheism has reigned for so long? In the martyrs of this century, those who have stood up, awakened by their consciences. What human greatness they testify to! Their strength was neither in their numbers nor in their knowledge but it was within themselves, in a clear awareness of what a human being is and in the meaning of a human life.



# "Look, I am making all things new!"

## Part two

At the heart of the faith of Israel is found the memory of a God who incessantly comes to his people in order to accomplish a new thing for them. The New Testament takes up this vision and manifests its deepest significance.

First of all, Jesus comes not to communicate a philosophy of life or ideas about God, but to announce some good news (Mark 1,14). The Greek word *euangelion* (Gospel) always refers to an event which changes the course of history; the great prophet of the Exile, Second Isaiah, uses the expression to speak of the new thing that God is doing by freeing his people from their captivity: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, of the messenger of good news who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion: Your God is king!" (Isa 52,7).

This helps us to understand that when Jesus speaks of the Good News of the Kingdom of God, he is not referring to a theoretical teaching but to a new presence of God at the heart of creation. A presence that calls for a radical response: trust in the messenger, take his message to heart and let it transform one's existence from beginning to end (cf. Mark 1,15). The verses that follow offer the translation of this reality in the life of a few ordinary men: some fishermen leave their homes and their occupation in order to set out on an adventure with Jesus (Mark 1,16-20).

But what is this new presence of God which Jesus proclaims? The answer to this question is given by the entire life of Jesus. All of his words and his actions, and above all the end of his life, help us to enter more deeply into the reality of the Kingdom of God. Let us examine a few elements.

First, Jesus heals the sick. In this way he helps us understand that he has come to bring to human beings the fullness of life (cf. John 10,10). Far from being feats of magic, the healings Jesus performs require a response of faith (cf. Mark 5,34; Matt 13,58 etc.) and should rather be understood as signs of God's creative love at work in the world. We could almost say that, for Jesus, they are part of his teaching.

In fact, Jesus spends a lot of time teaching both the crowds and his own disciples. He does not want to treat human beings as passive robots: they are called to enter consciously into the new life he offers. But how can the newness of God be expressed by our old, worn-out words? Jesus finds a solution by borrowing images from everyday life, by telling stories that make people think, by coming up with paradoxical formulas that are a kind of invitation to go deeper.

In a long instruction placed at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus speaks of two ways of living (Matt 5,38-47). One, the old way, could be called the "normal" way of living: loving those who love us. Jesus calls the other, the new way, "being perfect"; it is the way God himself acts. In a word, it is the way of forgiveness, loving those who hate us, doing good to those who do evil to us. Do we understand why forgiveness is such an important aspect of the identity of the God of the Bible? It is because God is the God who does a new thing, the Creator God, and forgiveness is nothing other than a love that makes a new beginning possible, a love that re-creates.

When something new enters our life, we are obliged to react in one way or another. In the same way, no one remains indifferent to the coming of Jesus. The Gospels show us a whole

gamut of possible responses: some leave everything to follow him; others come and listen to him, hoping to get something for themselves. And then there are those who reject his message, in particular his vision of a God who loves every human being without exception.

In the parable of the two sons which Jesus recounts, their attitude is that of the elder son, who has difficulty in seeing his wayward brother welcomed by his father with love (Luke 15,25-32). This attitude of refusal will determine the end of Jesus' life: by causing him to be arrested and put to death by the Romans, his enemies think they are bringing his work to an end. But Jesus uses this horrible death to express with even greater depth the meaning of his coming. The suffering and death of Jesus become an occasion to reveal how far God's love extends (cf. John 13,1; 15,13). On the cross, he speaks words of forgiveness for his executioners (Luke 23,34).

And then there comes a confirmation that the cross is indeed not the victory of violence and hatred, but rather a revelation that the love that forgives is stronger than death. This confirmation is given on the third day when the women discover the empty tomb. The announcement of the resurrection is truly the Good News in a nutshell; it is significant that the spontaneous reaction of those who are witnesses to it is to set out at once to share the news with others (Matt 28,8; Luke 24,33; etc.). Of all the "new things" God has done in the course of history, the resurrection of his Son is the culmination. It is the bringing to birth of a new world which will make possible a transformation of the human heart, finally able to live a new relationship of communion with God.



# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## JANUARY

# JOHANNINE HOURS

MARK 10,46-52

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

**1 FRI** Mk 10.17-22 Ph 4.4-7  
Jesus said to a rich man: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

**2 SAT** Jn 20.19-22 Heb 12.1-3  
The Risen Christ said to the disciples: Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.

**3 SUN** Mt 2.1-12 Is 60.1-6  
When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

**4 MON** 1 Jn 1.5-7 Jn 1.1-5  
God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

**5 TUE** Jn 1.6-14 1 Jn 1.9-2.2  
The true light that gives light to everyone came into the world.

**6 WED** Rv 21.22-26 Jn 1.15-18  
EPIPHANY The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.

**7 THU** Jn 1.19-28 1 Jn 2.8-10  
John the Baptist said, I am the voice of one calling in the desert: Make straight the way of the Lord!

**8 FRI** 1 Jn 2.20-25 Jn 1.29-31  
Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

**9 SAT** 1 Jn 2.29-3.3 Jn 2.1-12  
How great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called God's children. And that is what we are!

**10 SUN** Mt 3.13-17 Is 42.1-7  
When Jesus had been baptized, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice came from heaven: This is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him.

**11 MON** Mk 1.12-15 1 Jn 3.21-24  
After being tempted in the desert, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news of the Gospel."

**12 TUE** 1 Jn 4.1-6 Mk 1.16-20  
John writes: You are from God, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

**13 WED** 1 Jn 4.7-10 Mk 1.21-28  
This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

**14 THU** Mk 1.29-34 1 Jn 4.11-14  
In the evening, after sunset, people brought to Jesus the sick and the possessed. He healed them and drove out many evil spirits.

**15 FRI** 1 Jn 4.15-18 Mk 1.35-39  
God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

**16 SAT** 1 Jn 4.19-21 Mk 1.40-45  
This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother.

**17 SUN** Jn 1.29-34 Is 49.3-6  
John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**18 MON** 1 Jn 5.1-4 Mk 2.1-12  
Loving God means keeping his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

**19 TUE** Mk 2.13-17 1 Jn 5.9-13  
Jesus said: I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

**20 WED** 1 Jn 5.14-15 Mk 2.18-22  
John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

**21 THU** 1 Jn 5.18-20 Mk 3.1-6  
We are in the One who is true, as we are in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

**22 FRI** Heb 1.1-6 Mk 3.13-21  
In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways. But in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

**23 SAT** Heb 2.5-9 Mk 3.22-27  
Jesus, who submitted to death, is now crowned with glory. And the gift of his life is for the benefit of us all.

**24 SUN** Mt 4.12-23 Is 8.23b-9.3  
Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

**25 MON** Ac 26.16-18 Mk 16.14-18  
The Risen Christ said to Paul: I am sending you out so that people may turn from darkness to light and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins.

**26 TUE** Mk 3.31-35 Heb 2.10-15  
Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

**27 WED** Ti 1.1-4 Lk 22.24-30  
Paul writes to Titus: God gives his faithful the hope of eternal life which he promised before the beginning of time.

**28 THU** Heb 2.17-18 Mk 4.1-9  
Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**29 FRI** Mk 4.13-20 Heb 3.5-14  
Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

**30 SAT** Heb 4.12-16 Mk 4.26-29  
The word of God is alive and active. It discerns the thoughts and desires of the human heart.

**31 SUN** Mt 5.1-12 1 Co 1.26-31  
Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

*Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

**B**artimaeus, a blind man condemned to beg, is considered disturbing by those who are accompanying Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, the place where everything will be brought to fulfilment. But his cry overcomes all obstacles and reaches Christ. Jesus stops. He is not so absorbed by his aim that he no longer sees the suffering around him. Is it not in fact this suffering, before which humans flee, that he has come to assume, to take upon himself? In his eyes their are no outcasts.

What is striking in this story is that the healing occurs through a dialogue which reveals in Jesus a wonderment, even admiration before this blind man. This rejected beggar has already rediscovered his human dignity. What trust in this cry: "Have mercy on me"! He runs towards Christ even leaving behind his coat in which he had collected money. And Jesus' question, "What do you want?" pushes him to the extreme of trusting: he does not ask for alms, but dares to say: "Let me see!". Healed, he follows Jesus on his journey.

All of us are in need of healing. The cry of the blind man becomes our own cry in the "Kyrie eleison" of the liturgy, which seeks to replace bitterness in us with trust. Our heart turns towards Christ who suffers with us. And he gives us what is necessary to follow him on his path towards the resurrection. And our trust is welcomed by the admiration of Christ; a healing, a freedom begins in our depths.

- How does the attitude of Bartimaeus help me to renew my prayer?
- Do we sometimes become insensitive to people that we meet because we are too fixed on our own aims?



# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## FEBRUARY

# JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 12,49-50

*These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.*

**1 MON** Jesus offered up prayer and entreaty to the one who could save him from death, he surrendered himself and he was heard.

Heb 5.5-9 Mk 4.30-34

**2 TUE** **PRESENTATION OF THE LORD** When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

Lk 2.22-40 Mt 3.1

**3 WED** When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

Mk 4.35-41 Heb 6.10-20

**4 THU** Jesus' power to save those who come to God through him is absolute, because he lives for ever to intercede for them.

Heb 7.24-28 Mk 5.25-34

**5 FRI** Jesus took the hand of the child who had died, and said, "Little girl, I tell you to get up." At once she stood up and began to walk around.

Mk 5.35-43 Heb 8.6-12

**6 SAT** Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to change one's heart and they drove out many evil spirits.

Mk 6.6-13 Heb 9.11-15

**7 SUN** Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden.

Mt 5.13-16 Is 58.7-10

**8 MON** Christ, having offered himself only once to take away the sins of the many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Heb 9.24-28 Mk 6.30-44

**9 TUE** We have been made holy by Jesus Christ giving his life once and for all.

Heb 10.5-10 Mk 6.45-52

**10 WED** The Lord says: I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and wrongdoings I will remember no more.

Heb 10.11-18 Mk 6.53-56

**11 THU** Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak aside, away from the crowd. With a deep sigh, Jesus said "Ephphatha!", that is, "Be opened!". At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly.

Mk 7.31-37 Heb 10.22-25

**12 FRI** Remember the first days when, after having received the light of faith, you stood your ground in the face of great suffering. All your belongings were seized, and you accepted this joyfully because you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.

Heb 10.32-38 Mk 8.1-10

**13 SAT** Faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the certainty of realities that are unseen.

Heb 11.1-10 Mk 8.11-21

**14 SUN** Jesus said: If you are bringing you offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

Mt 5.20-25 Si 15.15-20

**15 MON** Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

Mk 8.27-30 Heb 11.13-16

**16 TUE** Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

Heb 12.1-3 Mk 8.31-33

**17 WED** What you have come to is nothing that can be known to the senses: what you have come to is the city of the living God and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Heb 12.18-24 Mk 8.34-35

**18 THU** We have been given possession of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us then be thankful and praise God.

Heb 12.26-28 Mk 9.1-10

**19 FRI** Be mindful of prisoners as if you yourselves were in prison with them, and of those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were also suffering.

Heb 13.1-6 Mk 9.14-29

**20 SAT** Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Heb 13.7-9 Mk 9.30-32

**21 SUN** Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.

Mt 5.38-48 Lv 19.1-2,17-18

**22 MON** Jesus said to his disciples: If anyone wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all and servant of all.

Mk 9.33-37 Heb 13.12-16

**23 TUE** May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Shepherd of the flock, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

Heb 13.20-21 Mk 9.38-41

**24 WED** **ASH WEDNESDAY** We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

2 Co 5.20-6.2 Mt 6.1-6,16-18

**25 THU** The Lord says: I watch over my Word to see it fulfilled.

Jr 1.4-12 Lk 9.22-25

**26 FRI** The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Tear your hearts and not your clothes, and come back to the Lord your God for he is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

Jl 2.12-13 Mt 9.14-17

**27 SAT** If you do away with the accusing finger and malicious talk, if you give what is yours for the hungry, then your light will rise in the darkness and your darkest hour will be like the middle of the day.

Is 58.9-12 Lk 5.27-32

**28 SUN** Jesus said to the tempter: Away with you! For Scripture says, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone".

Mt 4.1-11 Rm 5.12-19

*Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

Jesus understands his approaching death as a baptism, a passing through fire. Jesus gives his whole life, he accepts that everything be consumed, that this living flame of his love glows even during the deepest night. At that moment, inner deserts, all that remains hardened within us, can be enlightened, rekindled and even set alight by love. Just as the light is transmitted from one to another on the paschal night, so fire spreads by simple contact. Christ needs our whole being so that his fire can spread across the earth today. Transmitting this fire means daring to be witnesses of forgiveness and trust. How could others believe in forgiveness without meeting witnesses to it?

Often the Bible says that God's presence reveals the value of our life, like fire which purifies gold. Christ's fire shows that sin is not what is deepest within us. Christ's love consumes our whole being, his forgiveness burns away all that is worthless, even our faults, so that our real identity is revealed: each human being is created in the image of God and loved with an eternal love.

- What helps to rekindle the fire of Christ within me, and in the Church, when this fire has become like embers hidden under the ashes?

- What does this image of fire say to us about our relationship with Christ?



## GESTURES OF SOLIDARITY

## Brazil

### Children open up new ways

For several years, some brothers of Taizé have been living in a poor neighbourhood of a town in Brazil. One of them wrote:

"This afternoon, we're coming back to sing," said many of the children on Easter morning. They came and we sang Easter songs and then there were some games. They were sad that the "Via Sacra" was finished. Since then, they come back every Sunday afternoon. During the seven weeks of Lent, we went twice to 15 different houses throughout the neighbourhood, in every kind of weather.

In the beginning, 30 or 40 children went with us, towards the end there were around 200. We sang as we walked and in front of each house we prayed and read a passage from the Passion. Then the mother of the family carried the cross to the next house.

Often we had to enter into houses to pray with the sick, the blind, those who were paralysed and those who were not able to speak, the mentally ill and the old. The passage from the Gospel, "I sent you to bring the Good News to the poor" came to life. The faces remain before my eyes with the extreme poverty of the inside of the houses and the silent prayer with the poorest of the poor.

On days when we were free, I returned to spend more time with the sick. A mother told me how her son, who had just left prison on that day, had insisted on carrying the cross to the next house. Without the trust of the children who accompanied us, I do not know how it would have been possible to confront such great suffering. Readings from the prophet Isaiah, with his vision of another future, would not leave me.

During the Easter vigil, 25 children who had been following the catechism classes were baptised in a great celebration. Early in the morning, there was the Easter fire. The Resurrection is barely present in the mentality of the people. I saw two children arriving - one had come to see "Judas burning", the local custom which takes the place of Easter. The other had been to the catechism classes and was very proud to be able to explain to him what the Resurrection meant.

We set off with some young people in two processions down the middle of the deserted streets. A few children came to join us, and others ran ahead to waken their families. "Christ is risen today!" we announced in front of each door. Knowing to whom we were saying this made the words sometimes stick in my throat, but through this, I understood that it was me who was learning what was really the Easter faith. Nothing was well prepared, but the children opened up a path before

us. They sung in front of the doors until they opened. After two hours of procession, the two groups met up for breakfast and then went to the church for the celebration of the Resurrection with much singing and dancing."

## POLAND

### That which is lacking in our lives

A group of young people from the centre of Poland writes:

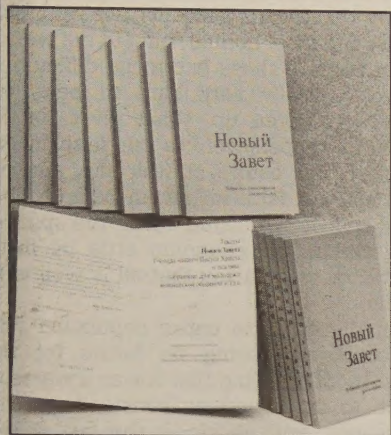
"At the end of this year's European meeting in Budapest, one of the members of our small group said: if we do not continue with our small communities, the experience of the European meeting will vanish into thin air. On the way home, in the coach, another theme came up: children.

Following this there were two months of prayer, of maturation, a time to free ourselves from fear. Then came Holy Week, a decisive moment. Many of us had taken on concrete responsibilities. On the Monday of Holy Week, for the first time we went after Mass to greet personally those who had come and to say to them: we are glad you have come. This brought joy, especially to the elderly people.

Then we tried to build a relationship with children whose families were victims of alcoholism. About forty came to our first meeting. It was evident they were hungry. Beginning the next day, thank God, we were able to find food to share with them. The girl who is responsible for this said, "We would like them to smile again. We want to offer them something hot to eat even if it is very little, and their joy is our joy."

Following these two activities, young people and adults began to become interested in the life of our parish community and to reflect on what they could do to help the children. A growing number of young people are joining the reflection on the Word of God in the weekly Bible circles. They devote their free time to working with children; they visit handicapped persons at home.

Ela has been visiting Tomek, who is handicapped and now also takes part in the parish meetings. She writes: "Tomek is so spontaneous, simple, full of the joy of Christ. Welcoming him as he is helps me discover realities that were lacking in my life."



→ In 1989, thanks to "Operation Hope," Taizé was able to send a million New Testaments to different parts of the Soviet Union. This year, Taizé has just sent to Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Smolensk, Saint Petersburg and Novgorod, 200,000 copies of a small book that contains, in Russian, a choice of the most accessible texts of the New Testament, grouped according to the events of Jesus' life and the main themes of the thought of Saint Paul. This book is meant to be given free of charge to young people as well as to all who are trying to understand the Bible's message. In the coming months, a similar edition will be published in Romanian as well as in other languages of Eastern Europe.

→ These past few months, children from Bosnia have been welcomed in Taizé and lorries full of food have been sent, particularly to Sarajevo. It is essential to keep sending aid to the victims of the war in that region of Europe.

→ The serious situation in Somalia, especially for children, and the great poverty in Bangladesh also call for our solidarity.

Everyone can contribute to these gestures of solidarity undertaken by Taizé by sending a contribution to:

UK: "Operation Hope," Bank Account no. 44495090, Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, LONDON WC2R 0QS. USA: "Operation Hope," c/o Taizé, 413 West 48th Street, New York NY 10036. IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, etc.: contributions may be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope."





## listening to the continents

### INDIA

#### A little salt and a candle

These past few months have seen the "Pilgrimage of Trust" in India become more intense. Already a year ago, the idea was born of having regional meetings that would be a preparation for the national gathering organized by the youth commission of the bishops' conference.

At Kazipet, where the gathering will be held, a weekend brought together, for a spiritual preparation, the different groups of those in charge. It was remarkable that one month before the event, they dared to devote so much time to a preparation which was not for the practical organization, but to find ways of welcoming the participants better.

Times of prayer alternated with a Bible reflection. Texts like the one from the Book of Kings: the poor widow who had almost nothing to eat for herself and her son but who, sharing all that was left, always had enough. Or the text of Saint Paul on the diversity of gifts in the members of the Body of Christ, a text that helps us better understand the meaning of such a meeting.

In Bombay, the meeting was held in a district of the city. What was striking was the maturity of the participants who came from the region. Almost all of them were beginning a professional life with social and political activities. Some had spent time in Taizé, and it was obvious that the experience had deeply affected them. For them, "inner life and human solidarities" are not empty words.

In all the other regions, young people

came from almost every diocese. Through the diversity and the richness of the sharing, they rediscovered the spirit that had animated them during the large meeting in Madras.

In the region of Bihar, for example, it was possible to make visits to people "whose lives speak to us." We met contemplative sisters, then Missionaries of Charity with the sick children whom they care for. This visit, which brought joy and support, came at the right time: just the day before, a child had died.

In the evening, more than 400 young people met for a vigil of light with their bishop. Prayer and silence were the central experience. For many it was the first experience of silence, and they had to conquer their fears and take the risk of entering it.

It was impressive to see these young people living a new adventure with such seriousness. Elements of the local liturgy were integrated into the prayer, highlighting the richness of the culture of the young Santals, Ourongs and other hill peoples.

They left for home with the mission of bringing with them the part of the Gospel that they had grasped during the weekend. Some brought back with them a little salt and a candle, expressing the text of Matthew's Gospel, while others brought a tiny mustard seed which enabled them to explain to their friends the parable of Jesus.

Many expressed the concern to offer the same experience to other young people living in very isolated villages. So in Karnataka, meetings were held on a diocesan level in the village parishes. The young people were so grateful to be able to welcome not only people from nearby parishes, but also those from further away.

And everyone helped to prepare the meals, to decorate the church with mango and banana leaves, even if most of the young people work the whole day in coffee plantations. At the end, they decided to meet once a month for a prayer around the cross.

### ZAIRE

#### There is still a future

A letter arrived from Kinshasa following the time of riots last year:

"Last winter, soldiers, together with other people, looted the whole city — shops, factories, private homes. They devastated the city. Now things have become calmer, but there is no security

and we live in a permanent state of political and economic chaos.

The centre for the street children has survived the crisis and continues as before, but we have a great many problems. Most of our children took part in the looting, and since that time all of them have lost their head, especially the older ones. They thought that stealing was the simplest and most normal thing in the world.

In spite of these enormous difficulties, psychologically very hard to bear, we have not given up. What gives us the courage to persevere is our faith in the project of a centre of welcome, and especially our faith in human beings. Now that school has begun again, the spirit of the children is changing little by little and now we can say that all is well with them.

In the city, the entire population was discouraged, seeing no future for the country and feeling that it was a waste of time to do something constructive. Our presence, and above all the fact that we keep working as if nothing had changed, has given hope to many people.

I have visited as many parishes as I can to meet with young people from the diocesan movement "Youth of Light." Those I met have regained their courage and say to themselves: "There is still a future; it's worth preparing for it." In this very difficult time, I see that God is using me to accomplish his work."

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